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STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

Mr. KERREY. Mr. President, a few weeks ago the Senate convened a joint meeting between Democrats and Republicans to receive a classified nuclear briefing from the Department of Defense. The purpose of this bipartisan meeting was for the members of the Senate to get a better understanding of our strategic nuclear weapons policy.

Our briefers, which included Admiral Richard Mies, Commander of STRATCOM, had been invited to the Senate to explain the details of the Single Integrated Operational Plan--or SIOP. The SIOP is the highly-classified nuclear blueprint of targets and targeting assignments for our strategic nuclear weapons arsenal, and is the driving force behind our strategic nuclear force levels. While the SIOP is a military document, it is based on guidance given to the Department of Defense by the President.

As elected representatives of the people, and with a Constitutional role in determining national security policy, Congress should have an understanding of the principles underpinning our nuclear policy. Both the guidance provided by the President and the details of the SIOP are necessary for us to make informed national security decisions.

With this in mind, we gathered in an interior room in the Capitol to get a full briefing on the SIOP. But when we asked the DoD briefers precise questions about the SIOP, we did not get the information we were seeking. The briefers were unable, or unwilling, to give us the kind of specific information about our nuclear forces and plans we need to make the decisions required as elected representatives of the people.

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In fact, when asked for detailed targeting information we were given three different answers. First, we were told that they did not bring that kind of information. Then, we were told there were people in the room who were not cleared to receive that kind of information. Finally, we were told that kind of information is only provided to the Senate leadership and members of the Armed Services Committee. Because members of the leadership and the Senate Armed Services Committee indicated they had never received such information, I can only surmise there must be a fourth answer.

We find ourselves in an uncomfortable and counter-productive Catch-22. Until we as civilians provide better guidance to our military leaders, we are unlikely to affect the kind of changes needed to update our nuclear policies to reflect the realities of the post-cold-war world. Yet, providing improved guidance is difficult when we are unable to learn the basic components of the SIOP. Given this, I followed up our meeting with a letter to Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle requesting that he schedule another briefing so that we could get the information our first briefers would not provide.

While I still believe this briefing is needed, we need not wait for a briefing on the details of the SIOP to answer the question of how many nuclear weapons are needed to deter potential aggressors. In truth, it is important for citizens, armed only with common sense and open-source information, to reach sound conclusions about our nuclear posture and

force levels.

To illustrate, we should ask experts to describe the deterrent capability of a single Trident submarine--our most survivable and reliable delivery platform. Within an hour of receiving an order to launch, a Trident could deliver and detonate 192 nuclear weapons on their targets. The minimum size of the detonations would 100 kilotons; the maximum would be 300 kilotons. By comparison, the Hiroshima detonation that caused Japan to sue for unconditional peace in August 1945 was only 15 kilotons. In the open, we should assess what damage 192 of these weapons would cause and determine whether this would deter most, if not all of the threats we face.

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Mr. President, I have made no secret of my strongly-held belief that we can and we should make dramatic reductions in our strategic nuclear arsenals. I believe that by keeping such a large arsenal of strategic nuclear weapons we are decreasing rather than enhancing our security. By keeping such a large arsenal we are forcing the Russians to keep more weapons than they can safely control. By keeping such a large arsenal we are increasing the chance of accidental or unauthorized launch. By keeping such a large arsenal we are increasing the likelihood of the proliferation of these weapons. By keeping such a large arsenal we are encouraging nations like India, Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea to pursue a nuclear weapons option. And finally, by keeping such a large arsenal we are diverting budgetary resources away from our conventional forces--the forces that are vital to protecting our interests around the globe.

In the near future, I will return to the Senate floor to discuss this issue further. I will return with non-classified information--information that comes not from briefings in secret rooms, but information all citizens can access through a simple search on Yahoo--in an attempt to better understand our nuclear policy and the changing definition of deterrence in the post-Cold War world.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Gorton). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I do have some Executive Calendar matters and other unanimous consent agreements that have already been worked out. I will proceed to those. However, I do note I want to offer a unanimous consent request with regard to the estate tax matter. I want the Democratic leader to be here when I make that request. I am hoping within the next few minutes we will also be able to conclude an agreement with regard to the Department of Defense authorization bill. Discussions are still underway, but I thought I would take advantage of this time.